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PAINTER DRESSES UP 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION BASE IN IRAQ IN HER SPARE TIME

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FORWARD OPERATING BASE SPEICHER, Iraq — Pfc. Youngok LeMaster earned her unit's Soldier of the month award for May, and it wasn't even her most impressive accomplishment that month.



PHOTO COURTESY 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION

The 1st Infantry Division "Victory Lady" on Forward Operating Base Speicher, Iraq, painted by Pfc. Youngok LeMaster, an automatic logistic specialist assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company of the division's support command.

LeMaster, an automated logistic specialist with Headquarters and Headquarters Company of V Corps' 1st Infantry Division Support Command, also found time to finish work on murals featuring the 1st Infantry Division "Victory Lady" and the United States and Iraqi flags.

In her time here, LeMaster has also painted a landscape mural for the base coffee house and worked halfway through her most ambitious project -- adding artwork to Speicher's helipad.

LeMaster began painting in her native Seoul, South Korea in high school. She says she had to abandon the hobby because it cost too much, but she started again after getting married.

"I was a housewife with nothing to do. That's how I started again," she said. "I'm still learning."

Her duties afford little in the way of off time, but when she does get some, she can often be found with a brush in hand.

"I do (physical training) every morning. I love doing PT," she said. "Then I go to work."



PHOTO COURTESY 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION

Pfc. Youngok LeMaster, an automatic logistic specialist assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company of V Corps' 1st Infantry Division Support Command, receives her unit's Soldier of the Month award for May 2004. In her spare time LeMaster paints murals around her unit's home on Forward Operating Base Speicher, Iraq.

It's hard to get time to paint. It took me a month and a half to do the Victory Lady. I would try to get in two hours if I could on the days I painted. I don't like painting every day."

Her prior works had been landscapes or portraits on paper, so the mural proved challenging.

"I had never done one that big before," she said. "I had to use a ladder. That was a little bit scary."

But she says it was all worth it in the end. "People tell me I should get paid for it, but I don't need that," LeMaster said. "People have their picture taken in front of the Victory Lady and everybody knows who did it. That's very satisfying."

Her coffee house mural was inspired in part by the different places she's lived. There are South Korean mountains; the beating of an Iraqi sun, and a California beach.

The helipad will eventually feature four distinctive LeMaster works. She's already completed a welcome message and the 1st Infantry Division "Big Red One" patch. Up next will be division mottos and the 42nd Infantry Division logo.

The time LeMaster spends on a work varies widely, depending on its complexity.

"I have to do it in my personal time, so it can take a month and a half, like it did with the Victory Lady. The coffee house was a much simpler project, and I did it in a day; about three or four hours," she said.

The helipad will be one of the longer projects, but LeMaster said she doesn't mind.

"I love it here and I love to paint," she said. I like being busy."

